

VZCZCXR06494
RR RUEHAG RUEHDF RUEHIK RUEHLZ
DE RUEHTC #0406/01 0541250
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 231250Z FEB 06
FM AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 4912
INFO RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE
RUCPDOC/USDOC WASHDC
RUEHAT/AMCONSUL AMSTERDAM 0414

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 THE HAGUE 000406

SIPDIS

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STATE FOR EUR/UBI

USDOC FOR 4212/USFCS/MAC/EUR/OWE/DCALVERT
USDOC FOR 3133/USFCS/OIO/JBREIDENSTEIN/PBUCHER

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: ECON SOCI PHUM PREL PGOV KISL PINR NL

SUBJECT: REACHING OUT TO THE DUTCH MUSLIM BUSINESS
COMMUNITY

REF: A) 05 THE HAGUE 2993

- B) THE HAGUE 141
- C) THE HAGUE 228
- D) THE HAGUE 402

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¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. An Embassy lunch with members of the Dutch Muslim business community on February 8 succeeded in launching a constructive dialogue on discrimination in Dutch employment practices, unemployment among young ethnic Muslims, and the pros and cons of membership in ethnic business associations. As a follow-on, the Mission is bringing together a group to discuss internship opportunities for ethnic Muslim youth. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) On February 8, the Charge hosted a lunch with guests representing a broad spectrum of the Muslim business community (ethnic Turks, Moroccans, Afghans, and Surinamese) as well as "native" Dutch participants from a youth employment organization, a knowledge network for integration policy, the Ministry of Economic Affairs (MEA), and the American Chamber of Commerce.

OVERCOMING WORKPLACE DISCRIMINATION

¶3. (SBU) Emin Ates, an ethnic Turk and General Manager of International Sales at RICOH Europe, opened the discussion by calling for a frank discussion of employment discrimination issues. With unemployment among ethnic Muslim youths estimated between 24 and 40 percent (see ref A and B), the time had come for immediate action. Dutch companies continued to "play it safe" by hiring only those with Dutch origins, after pointing to a lack of language skill as the primary reason. If non-English speaking immigrants can find jobs in the U.S., a lack of language skills should no longer be used as an excuse for denying jobs to ethnic Muslims in the Netherlands, he said.

¶4. (SBU) Nathaly Mercera, an ethnic Surinamese and Project Manager of Importante (a women's empowerment foundation)

said discrimination had become more acute recently in the Netherlands. Even well-educated ethnic minorities were having problems finding jobs. Margo Groenewoud, a "native" Dutch and Program Leader of the Dutch Knowledge Network for Integration Policy and Ethnic Minorities, agreed that people should be judged by their qualifications and not their ethnic backgrounds. Rahma el Mouden, an ethnic Moroccan and Director of MAS Dienstverleners (an office cleaning service company), accused Dutch companies of distorting the truth when they claimed not to be able to find educated ethnic minorities for employment. Such candidates clearly existed. Moreover, the Dutch government continued to set a bad example by not seeking out and hiring more ethnic minorities, she said.

¶15. (SBU) Tjark de Lange, a "native" Dutch and Chairman of Exchange Young Executives (EYE) and former Chairman of Young Management at VNO-NCW (employers' association), suggested the practice of identifying ethnic groups by their country of origin rather than their Dutch nationality only exasperated the problem. A separation of business organizations along ethnic lines further defined these distinctions. El Mouden, the ethnic Moroccan, countered that ethnic business organizations were currently needed to teach ethnic businesses the way into established Dutch business networks/circles.

INTEGRATION VERSUS ASSIMILATION

¶16. (SBU) Maritza Russel, an ethnic Surinamese and Chair of the Black Business Women's Association worried that "us versus them" distinctions had hardened following 9/11. Ahmet Taskan, an ethnic Turk and Managing Director of Annifer (a Turkish business association), suggested that it was better to accept differences than pursue a policy of assimilation. Hatim Chebti, an ethnic Moroccan and consultant to Mex-IT (Advisors for Intercultural

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Management), predicted integration would never happen so long as ethnic groups continued to attend different schools and to work and live separately.

LOOKING TO THE U.S.

¶17. (SBU) Integration had become a global reality, noted El Mouden, and the Netherlands and other countries could learn from steps taken by the U.S. in response to its Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s. The Charge explained that the U.S. legal framework in this area was strict and had taken time to develop. The guests appreciated the Commercial Attaché's comment that she was an 'American first' and a 'African American' second.

¶18. (SBU) Jules Kortenhorst, President of International Operations at ClientLogic and American Chamber of Commerce Board Member, asked whether there might be a need for "Affirmative Action" legislation in the Netherlands. Such measures had existed in the past, Russel noted, and perhaps should be considered again. The key, Mercera stressed, would be how such measures were implemented.

¶19. (SBU) De Lange cautioned that positive discrimination could not be forced, as companies want to hire the best. Ates suggested that an easing of employment regulations, including the ability to fire employees, might be another way to address this problem. Most participants agreed that strict employment protection legislation for permanent workers in the Netherlands made it difficult for new workers, including ethnic minorities, to gain entry into the workforce.

INTERNSHIPS - OFFERING YOUTHS A FAIR CHANCE

¶10. (SBU) Ates continued that ethnic Muslims must be offered a fair chance to compete in the Dutch workforce. He noted that his local Lions Club was looking at possible projects to help minority youths gain work experience. Kaya Turan Kocak, an ethnic Turk and Project Manager for Turkish Business Outreach at Rabobank in Eindhoven, agreed that businesses should take an active role in working with the government to find solutions. As an example, he noted Rabobank's work with programs offering work internships for ethnic Muslim youths at various business locations in Amsterdam, The Hague, Utrecht, and Eindhoven. Marko Pater, a "native" Dutch and Policy Advisor on developing Turkish business opportunities, MEA, explained that his ministry had a policy of offering internships to all qualified candidates. The Charge and Commercial Attaché welcomed further dialogue on how to advance these and Mission efforts to provide internship opportunities for ethnic Muslim youths.

FOLLOW-ON OUTREACH ACTIONS

¶11. (SBU) This was the third in a series of themed lunches aimed at increasing the Mission's outreach to and understanding of the Dutch Muslim community. The lunch also served as an immediate follow-on to Emboffs' meetings with various representatives of the Muslim business community over the last few months (ref D). Past lunches covered media (ref C) and education issues (septel). Future lunches will cover Muslim participation in the Dutch political process, foreign policy/global outreach, Imam training, the development of Muslim entrepreneurs and business opportunities, Muslim Women's business issues, and Muslim women's issues in general.

¶12. (SBU) As a direct follow-on to this lunch, the Mission will bring together a smaller group to share information and experiences regarding efforts to offer internships to ethnic Muslim youth. Contacts developed through these meetings and meetings with the ethnic Muslim business community can serve as interlocutors for future trade missions and visitors.

BLAKEMAN